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Dulles to McCone

President Kennedy's first announcement, in making appointments in advance of his inauguration, was that he would continue in office J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI and Allen Dulles of the CIA. The news was almost universally approved. But last April, after the wretched mess of the invasion of Cuba, dark clouds hung over the CIA. Now Mr. Dulles, at 67, wants to get out. And President Kennedy has chosen the dynamic John A. McCone, President Eisenhower's last Atomic Energy chairman, to take his place.

As far as one can tell from the outside, this is an excellent choice in itself. It is also reassuring to have Mr. Kennedy tap a Republican for a change, especially since his federal court appointments seem to go only to Deserving Democrats. But the main thing is that Mr. McCone has a record of being not only a producer, but also tough. And this is a job that demands toughness, not to say a lack of squeamishness.

An intelligence agency is in fact something that does not set well in a democratic society. The United States did not even get into the business seriously until World War II, though the great powers of the old Europe had long practiced it under the surface.

After all, intelligence is, among other things, spying under another name. And spying must be done in secret, which is alien to a society built on the idea that it functions best if everything the government does is put right on the line out in the open. There is the further complication that intelligence work sometimes consists not so much in ferreting out information as in stirring up trouble, or perhaps in preventing it, abroad.

One might think that this particular branch of undercover activity would properly be housed in some inner recesses of the Pentagon, along with other modern-day military paraphernalia like guerrilla warfare. However that may be, in a world of sovereign powers living in international anarchy, all big powers find it necessary to indulge in spying while pretending in public that there isn't really any such thing—except on the part of hostile powers. So it is good that the aggressive Mr. McCone has been chosen, and that he has accepted. As for Mr. Dulles, pending the time when history writes the final score, he should have our thanks for a thankless task done, over a wearying time, in a difficult day.